

## Wall paintings at the Old George, High Street

The photograph shows a section of wall painting found in the George Inn. The design was marked out in black over a white lime plaster. Touches of pale red and yellow had then been added. At a later date a lime wash had been applied and a deeper red pattern painted over the original one. Ochre would have been used. The yellow turns to red as it is heated.

A report by E Clive Rouse, dated February 1980, is appended

### WALL PAINTINGS AT THE OLD INN

#### WHEATLEY, OXON.

### GENERAL

A considerable area of wall painting has come to light in the course of renovations and alterations to premises known as The Old Inn, almost opposite the Manor House in Wheatley. I visited the house on Sunday, 10th February 1980 and have pleasure in commenting as follows.

The street frontage at present is entirely 18th century, with a large entrance arch, and sash windows. Until recently the premises were divided into several tenements, and the present work has revealed many details of the original house, which seems to have been the George Inn, and a Will of the late 16th century can be related to the premises.

There are paintings in two rooms, one on the ground floor to the left of the entrance archway, and the other in the room above it, both rooms containing good, moulded, stone four-centred arched fireplaces.

### THE FIRST FLOOR ROOM

A. There are two periods of painting In the first floor room. That on the base plaster consists of a very large representation of a Tudor rose in an elaborate frame some 2 feet square set longwise, incorporating fleurs-de-lys in the corners. It is basically in black outline on the white lime plaster, with touches of pale red and yellow. This is surrounded by a Curved trellis pattern enclosing foliage, all in black and white. There is a broad frieze at the top whose detail is not at present clear. below this is a line of single twist ornament. The decoration appears to extend the whole length of this wall, over the fireplace, which is not sited centrally.

B. Painted directly over this on a thin skim of limewash is a later design in deep red. This, unfortunately, now adheres largely to the underside of the thick coat of plaster with which the whole wall was later covered. The scheme appears to consist of dividing vertical stripes each about 2 inches or so in width, with running scroll foliage between. There may have been a frieze at the top, with pendant drops below it.-2-

### THE GROOUND FLOOR ROOM

C. In the room below Mr. Young has found painting on the plaster above the large stone fireplace, and possibly on the stone itself. The design here is better preserved, and appears to be the same as the later painting in the room above. Put in addition there is a large crescent centrally placed, in black, whose significance I cannot at the moment explain.

## DATING

Various details are of some help in trying to assign a date to these paintings. The Royal Arms or emblems or details from them were a favourite decoration in Inns, The Crown at Amersham has the Elizabethan Royal Arms over a fireplace. A house, possibly once an Inn now demolished on Market Hill, Buckingham, has a large Tudor Royal Arms also set lozenge-wise. The Swan at Ampthill, Bedfordshire, has later arms and devices, and so on. The Tudor Rose itself suggests a Tudor origin, and the fleurs-de-lys also come in the Tudor Royal Arms. Sixteenth century domestic paintings are also often in black and white, and a single twist motif is also common in late Elizabethan work, So I would suggest a date towards the end of the 16th century, 1675-1690 as a possibility.

The later painting is more difficult to date? but allowing a reasonable time before the first design became dilapidated or unfashionable and was covered, one would suppose it be about the middle of the 17th century.

## CONDITION AND TREATMENT

I showed Mr. Young the best method of uncovering from beneath limewash, with a special, sharpened small scaling hammer. Where the plaster is weak or loose and the painting underneath fragile it is better to flake with a plasterer's 'smell-tool.' A soft brush may be gently used to free lime dust and dirt, but the lines of the design should not be brushed over. A fine mist spray of clean water can be used to dissipate much lime dust. And the painting can be sprayed before photography to enhance the colours.

It is difficult to say, what to do about the later painting adhering to the underside of the thick hair plaster covering. Some sheets of this I saw had been kept, and it is, of course, possible to uncover this. But if the design in the room below can be got out well, I think the time, difficulty and labour involved in trying to preserve a large area in the upper room is hardly justified.

The original painting is on a very thin layer of lime over the base plaster, and is friable in places. These edges or loose areas can be consolidated by the use of a thin lime-putty solution, applied by a small paint brush, letting the lime dribble down behind the loose edges or areas, and can be toned out afterwards. When the whole has been uncovered, one can then assess the position and make further suggestions. Finally, I think, since the room will be in use and must look presentable, as well as protecting the painting, the best area selected for preservation can be lightly framed and glazed.

Signed:

E, CLIVE ROUSE, O.B.E., M.A., F.S.A.

Rated»

18th February, 1980.

Oakfield,  
North Park,  
Gerrards Cross,  
Bucks.